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Israel denies taking U.S. technology

By Jonathan Broder
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JERUSALEM—Israel Wednesday strongly rejected U.S. allegations that it had smuggled U.S. technology to produce cluster-bombs, and officials accused the U.S. Justice Department of conducting a campaign to damage Israel's reputation and its relations with the United States.

A statement issued by the Defense Ministry called the allegations of Israeli high-tech smuggling published Tuesday by the U.S. media "unfounded" and said the development of Israel's production of cluster-bomb shells was "totally independent" of the United States.

"The Ministry of Defense determines that the raising of the subject arouses serious astonishment and may unjustly prejudice Israel's reputation and cloud the good relations prevailing between the United States and Israel," the statement said.

The spokesman added that the Defense Ministry "takes a grave view of the fact that this matter has been published before the facts have been clarified."

Israel's ambassador to the United States, Meir Rosenne, was summoned to the State Department Tuesday and told that the Justice Department had opened a major investigation into the allegedly illegal transfer of cluster-bomb technology to Israel.

According to news reports from Washington, Richard Murphy, assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian affairs, informed Rosenne that between three and eight Israeli officials attached to the Defense Ministry's arms-purchasing mission in New York were expected to be indicted in the alleged smuggling operation.

A U.S. Customs official was quoted in one report as saying that eight Israelis and a dozen U.S. executives were subpoenaed in the government probe, and search warrants were served against the 12 U.S. companies believed to have been involved in the operation.

According to the news reports, the unidentified Israeli officials who have been implicated do not have diplomatic immunity.

The United States banned the sale of cluster-bombs after Israel reportedly used the devices during its 1982 invasion of Lebanon.

The bomb, used extensively by the United States in Vietnam, releases 150 baseball-size grenades over a 50-by 200-meter area. Cluster bombs can carry antipersonnel, antitank, incendiary and

chemical payloads, and can be equipped with timers or sensors that turn them into land mines.

The Defense Ministry spokesman said its arms-purchasing mission in New York had obtained all the required export licenses from the U.S. State Department to buy the industrial equipment for Israel's production of cluster-bombs, which "started some time ago."

"All the applications have been lawfully made and ... no item, large or small, relating to this subject is exported from the United States to Israel without a lawful permit," the Defense Ministry statement said.

"There was no case here of unlawful technological export," the statement said. "The entire development and the related know-how are original Israeli ones."

The State Department has declined to comment on the allegations.

"There have been a whole rash of statements and allegations portraying Israel as a somewhat mysterious and powerful force subverting legal procedures in the United States, and the fact is these are not true," said Abba Eban, chairman of parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee.

The latest allegations against Israel came just as the strains in U.S.-Israeli relations were beginning to ease following the Jonathan Pollard spy scandal. Pollard, a former U.S. Navy intelligence analyst, pleaded guilty in May to spying for Israel.

The Justice Department said last week that an Israeli Air Force gen-

eral named as an unindicted co-conspirator in the Pollard affair still may be indicted.

The allegations also follow several other alleged arms-smuggling cases in the United States involving Israelis.

Avraham Baram, an Israeli Army reserve general, is awaiting trial in New York in connection with an alleged conspiracy to illegally sell \$2.75 billion worth of American-made weapons to Iran. Jerusalem has denied any connection with the alleged plot.

Last December, U.S. Customs agents raided factories in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Connecticut as part of the FBI's investigation into the alleged smuggling to Israel of plans to manufacture advanced tank cannon. Israel has insisted the exports were carried out with the knowledge and approval of U.S. authorities.

Eban said he didn't believe the latest allegations would cause lasting damage to U.S.-Israeli relations.